



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

Arc Dome Fish Restoration Project

Scoping Document, Notice of Opportunity to Comment on a Proposed Activity

Austin-Tonopah Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Nye County, NV
February 27, 2018



Comments Welcome

The Austin-Tonopah Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest welcomes your comments on this proposal to authorize the Nevada Department of Wildlife to remove non-native fish from streams within the Arc Dome Wilderness and reintroduce the native Lahontan cutthroat trout back into areas where they historically occurred. (See project Vicinity Map).

The purpose of the scoping process is to solicit public comment early in the analysis. Written, facsimile, hand delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the 36 CFR 218 Notice of Proposed Action in the Battle Mountain Bugle and the Tonopah Times-Bonanza. For detailed information on how to provide comments please refer to the “Comment Process” section of this document on page 10.

Proposed Project Location

The project area is located on the west side of the Toiyabe Mountain Range in Central Nevada within the Arc Dome Wilderness. The Upper Reese River and the Stewart Creek stream systems flow off west side of the Toiyabe Crest into Reese River Valley.

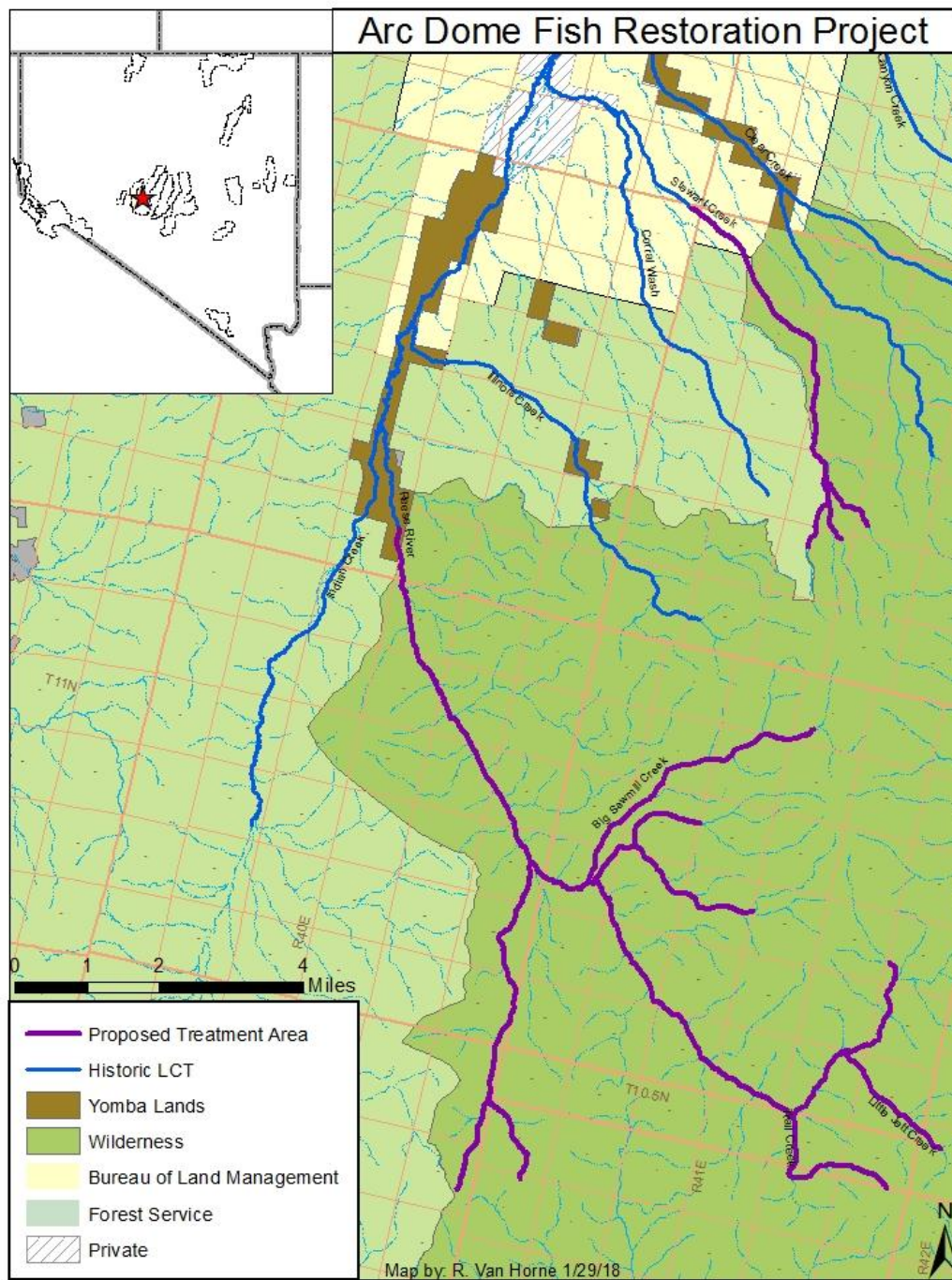


Figure 1. Vicinity Map.

NEED FOR ACTION

Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT) (*Oncorhynchus clarkii henshawi*) are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The objective of the 1995 Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Recovery Plan is to remove LCT from the List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife and Plants (USFWS 1995 p. 47). Lahontan cutthroat trout will be considered for delisting when management has been instituted to enhance and protect habitat required to sustain appropriate numbers of viable self-sustaining populations. Two of the identified threats to LCT are displacement and/or hybridization with nonnative trout and competition with nonnative fishes (USFWS 1995). As of 2009, LCT only occupied 8.6% of their historic habitat (USFWS 2009). Long ago, non-native fish were introduced into the Upper Reese River and Stewart Creek stream systems. Over time these non-native species, primarily brown trout, brook trout, and rainbow trout, have out competed and hybridized with the native Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT) and in these streams replaced the native species.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest are working cooperatively to re-establish native LCT populations throughout its range to recover and conserve the species. One of the geographic areas the agencies are focusing their recovery efforts on is the Reese River watershed. Lahontan cutthroat trout historically occupied approximately 501.1 miles of the Reese River watershed and have been extirpated from all about 15.3 (3%) stream miles (USFWS 2009). In order to recover the species, additional miles of historic habitat within the watershed need to be restored for LCT.

Current management in the Upper Reese River and Stewart Creek stream systems provides high quality habitat for LCT, retaining necessary cool water habitat to allow for long-term persistence of the species. In order to provide for the establishment of a viable population in those systems, the non-native trout populations need to be removed and native LCT reintroduced.

Both stream systems within the project area are within the Arc Dome Wilderness. The Wilderness Act defines an area of wilderness as retaining its primeval character and influence, and is managed to preserve its natural conditions. The presence of non-native trout species in the stream systems within the boundaries of the Arc Dome Wilderness detracts from the potential natural conditions of the wilderness. Returning native LCT to the stream systems in the Arc Dome Wilderness would be consistent with preserving the natural conditions of the wilderness.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Nevada Department of Wildlife has proposed chemical treatment of two stream systems, within wilderness, as part of an interagency effort with the USFWS and the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest to re-establish and perpetuate the LCT. The LCT is an indigenous species of concern that has been adversely affected by human influence and is listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Removal of non-native trout would be through the use of the piscicide rotenone. LCT would be stocked in the streams

once monitoring shows that the non-native species have been eliminated. The specific methods for each of the two stream systems are detailed below.

Upper Reese River Stream System

The implementation of the Upper Reese River treatment would be done under low flow conditions that exist in below average precipitation years. Up to 23.1 miles of stream are proposed to be treated. Under low flow conditions portions of the Upper Reese River and isolated reaches within its tributaries can have dry stream reaches. This will enable the treatment to be conducted in two smaller segments and without the need to construct temporary fish barriers. The treatment of isolated/non-connected waters (e.g. Beason Creek, Trail Creek), may occur prior to the treatment of Segments #1 and #2. Areas with intermittent flow will be treated using a backpack sprayer to apply the rotenone. Treatment of Segments #1 and #2 will last approximately one week per segment; a follow-up treatment may be necessary later that year or the next year depending upon monitoring results.

The treatment of Segment #1 would include the portion of the Upper Reese River and all tributaries (including Little Jett and Trail Creeks) upstream from the middle portion of the Reese River (Between Little Sawmill Creek and the Stone Cabin administrative site). Rotenone will be dripped for 6 hours on two consecutive days into flowing waters from buckets spaced approximately one-half mile apart. Areas with intermittent flow will be treated using a backpack sprayer to apply the rotenone. Rotenone is typically neutralized with potassium permanganate in flowing waters, however having dry segments will eliminate the need to neutralize rotenone. Twelve to 18 individuals will have a base camp at the headwater portion of the Upper Reese River to operate the upper drip stations and sprayers. The remaining individuals (approximately 15) will be based out of the Stone Cabin Administrative Site. The piscicide will be transported into the job site by pack stock and to drip stations on foot and applied by personnel using personal protection equipment prescribed on the rotenone application label.

The treatment of Segment #2, which would be accomplished within 2 weeks of the Segment #1 treatment, and would include the portion of the Upper Reese River and all tributaries (including Big Sawmill, Little Sawmill, and Beason Creeks) downstream from Little Sawmill Creek. Rotenone will be dripped for 6 hours on two consecutive days into flowing waters from buckets spaced approximately one-half mile apart. Areas with intermittent flow, slack water, seeps and springs, will be treated using a backpack sprayer to apply the rotenone. Eight to 13 individuals will have a base camp at the headwater portion of the Big Sawmill Creek to operate the upper drip stations and sprayers. The remaining individuals (approximately 25) will be based in the area close to the confluence of the Big Sawmill Creek with the Reese River, and adjacent to the meadow along the Cow Canyon Trail, and at the neutralization site. If neutralization with potassium permanganate is needed, the site would be downstream off of National Forest System lands and outside of the Arc Dome Wilderness Area. Equipment and personnel would be transported to and within the project area by pack stock and on foot. All personnel assisting in the fish removal would use hardened or durable sites for camping and would be familiar with and practice Leave No Trace (LNT) principles.

Post-treatment stocking of LCT would begin the year following the successful removal of all non-native trout and would continue annually until a population is established. Stocking activities would be accomplished with less than 15 individuals and without motorized equipment. Reestablishment of LCT in the treatment reaches within wilderness would be through use of fish from genetically pure donor Reese River populations. Lahontan cutthroat trout would be restocked by the NDOW. Fish would be transported into wilderness in buckets or fish cans. Several years of restocking would be needed to establish a population similar to pretreatment levels. If more donor fish can be used, the population will be established faster. All personnel assisting in the fish removal and restocking efforts would be familiar with and practice LNT principles.

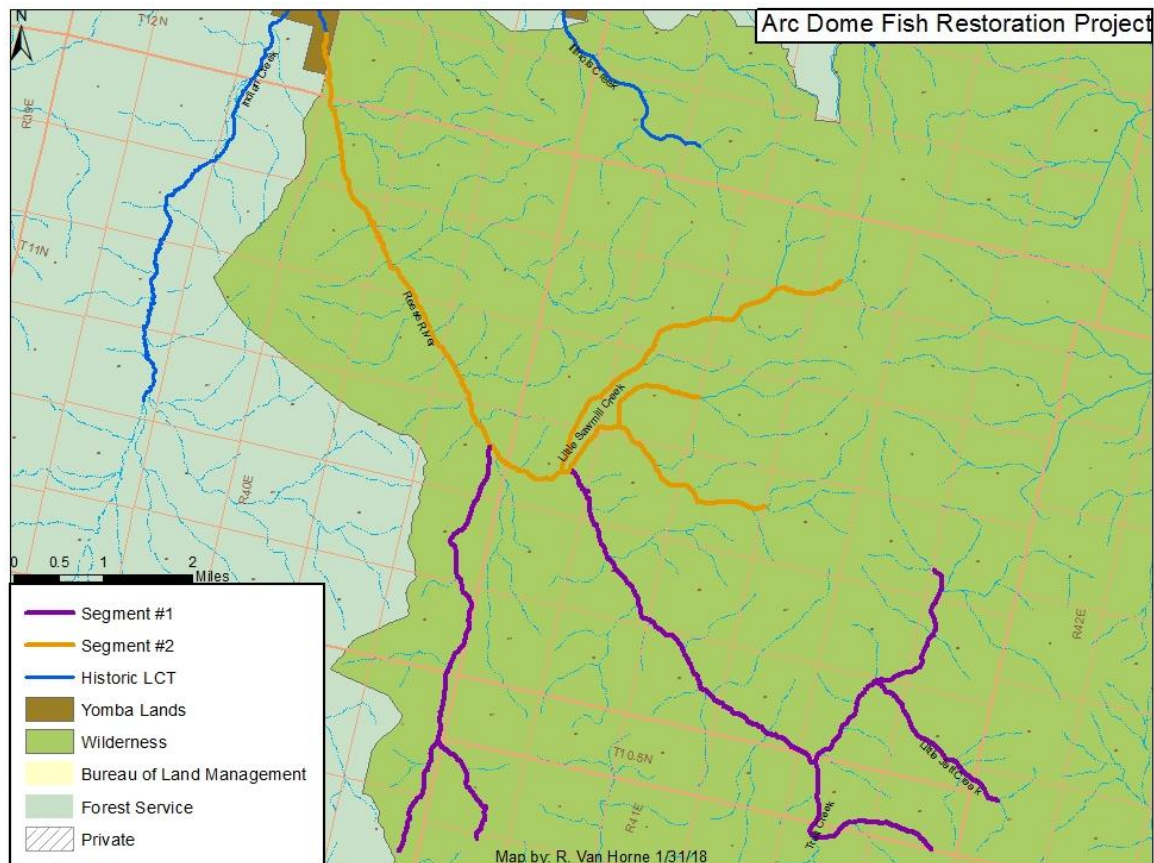


Figure 2: Upper Reese River treatment segments.

Stewart Creek Stream System

The Stewart Creek treatment is logistically different from the upper Reese River Treatment. The four stream miles to be treated within wilderness are within one-half mile from Forest Service Road 119. The Columbine Campground Recreation Site is located immediately adjacent to Stewart Creek and the Arc Dome Wilderness Area.

The three forks of the Stewart Creek stream system, including the mainstem, would be treated at the same time. Rotenone will be dripped for 6 hours on two consecutive days into flowing waters from buckets spaced approximately one-half mile apart. Areas with intermittent flow, slack water, seeps and springs, will be treated using a backpack sprayer

to apply the rotenone. Treatment of Stewart Creek will last approximately one week; a follow-up treatment may be necessary later that year or the next year depending upon monitoring results. The piscicide will be transported to the Columbine Campground via vehicles and to the job site by foot. Rotenone will be applied by personnel using personal protection equipment prescribed on the rotenone application label. If neutralization with potassium permanganate is needed, the site would be downstream off of National Forest System lands and outside of the Arc Dome Wilderness Area.

Camping and meals, and equipment storage would concentrate around the Columbine Campground while conducting fish removal activities on the Stewart Creek complex. Personnel (approximately 30 individuals) and equipment would be transported to the campsite via motorized vehicle and within the project area (wilderness) on foot. All personnel assisting in the fish removal would be familiar with and practice LNT principles while within wilderness.

Post-treatment stocking of LCT would begin the year following the successful removal of all non-native trout and would continue annually until a population is established. Stocking activities would be accomplished with less than 5 individuals and without motorized equipment. Reestablishment of LCT in the treatment reaches within wilderness would be through use of fish from genetically pure donor Reese River populations. Lahontan cutthroat trout would be restocked by the NDOW. Fish would be transported into wilderness in buckets or fish cans. Several years of restocking would be needed to establish a population similar to pretreatment levels. If more donor fish can be used, the population will be established faster. All personnel assisting in the fish removal and restocking efforts would be familiar with and practice LNT principles while within wilderness.

DESIGN FEATURES

No motorized equipment or mechanical transport would be used in wilderness. The Nevada Department of Wildlife will obtain a temporary Water Pollution Control permit from the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection in order to meet the direction and intent of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act). The state will provide certified applicators and will strictly adhere to application directions and guidance.

Crews will camp at areas designated by the Forest Service and follow LNT practices to minimize impact while in Arc Dome Wilderness.

To educate the public regarding the LCT restoration project and prevent reintroduction of non-native fish, the agencies would place educational materials at kiosks at trailheads.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION IMPACTS

The following table summarizes the potential impacts of the proposed action by the affected resources.

Affected Resource	Summary of Preliminary Effects Analysis
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Air Quality	With the exception of fugitive dust produced by the vehicles transporting material and personnel to the trailhead and camping area there is not expected to be any impact on Air Quality from the proposed action.
Water/Water Quality	A temporary deterioration of water quality (approximately one week) due to the use of the piscicide, rotenone will occur within treated streams.
Noxious and Invasive Weeds	No ground disturbance will occur that would encourage the spread of noxious weeds into the treatment areas. If necessary to provide pack stock feed, certified weed free hay will be used. All equipment used will be cleaned of plant material before it is brought into the project area.
Wildlife	Work crews will be on site during three one week periods in late summer. During these periods wildlife will be displaced by the presence of the crew. After the crews leave it may take several days for the wildlife to return to the area. Treated waters are toxic to aquatic gill-breathing organisms, however, they are not toxic to terrestrial wildlife.
Special Status Plants Species	No vegetation treatments or ground disturbing activities are proposed.
Native American Religious Concerns	Consultation with local tribes will be ongoing to determine if there are any historic properties of religious or cultural significance that might be affected by the undertaking.
Visual Resources	The treatment does not include construction of permanent structures, or manipulation of vegetation.
Inventoried Roadless Areas	No effects to Inventoried Roadless Areas is expected. The project occurs within designated Wilderness. Any access to trailheads or campsites will be on designated National Forest System roads.
Wilderness Characteristics	There are short-term negative impacts to the Natural, Untrammeled, and Solitude/Primitive/Unconfined Wilderness characteristics however the proposed action restores natural conditions over the long term and is, overall, a positive impact to the Natural quality. Treatments are expected to take approximately one week, however, a subsequent year treatment may be needed if monitoring shows the presence of non-native trout. Reintroductions could occur for several years but would involve restocking via horseback.
Recreation	The necessary number of personnel during piscicide

Affected Resource	Summary of Preliminary Effects Analysis
	applications will temporarily impact the opportunity for visitors to experience primitive recreation in those areas. Until LCT are restocked and increase in abundance within project waters, anglers may seek out other area waters that provide better fishing opportunities.
Cultural Resources	Some of the treatment crew will camp at the Stone Cabin Administrative site and some supplies may be stored in the cabin which is consider eligible for the national register of historic places, however, no modifications to the structure will occur. No vegetation treatments or ground disturbing activities are proposed that may affect cultural resources.

COMMENT PROCESS

Individuals and organizations wishing to comment and be eligible to object must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 218 Subpart A and B. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project during a public comment period established by the responsible official are eligible to file an objection under §218. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice.

The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates of timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. The notice will be published in the Battle Mountain Bugle and the Tonopah Times-Bonanza.

Written comments must be submitted to: **Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Attn: Lance Brown, District Ranger, 100 Midas Rd. Austin, NV 89310**; submitted by FAX (775) 964-1451; or to the facsimile number (775) 964-2671. The office hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00-4:30 Monday-Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to: comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-austin-tonopah@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility.

If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and address of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

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